

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HARRY J. ATKINSON

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
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Interviewers
Edward H. Buske
(signature)

(signature)

Interviewee
Harry J. Dickinson
(signature)
1711 Glenwood Ave.
(address)

(signature)
July 22, 1973
(date)

Joliet, Ill.
(city & state)
July 22, 1973
(date)

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INTERVIEWEE: Harry Atkinson

INTERVIEWER: Ed Bruske

BRUSKE: This is an interview with Mr. Harry Atkinson of 1711 Glenwood Avenue, Joliet, Illinois, July 22, 1973.

BRUSKE: Mr. Atkinson, you began at the Joliet Junior College in 1908?

ATKINSON: February of 1909.

BRUSKE: That was about eight years after the Junior College had actually started.

ATKINSON: One year after the Junior College started.

BRUSKE: I thought it had begun in 1901. The classes first started in. . .

ATKINSON: I was away at school in the meantime.

BRUSKE: I see; but had the college been running since 1901?

ATKINSON: Yes, I was there in the college in 1902-1903, so one year.

BRUSKE: Were you a student at the college you mean?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: Where did you go from there?

ATKINSON: The University of Illinois.

BRUSKE: And you had a degree in mathematics?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: Then you came back in 1909 to teach at the Junior College? How large was the Junior College at the time?

ATKINSON: I can't tell you exactly how large it was. It wasn't very large--under a hundred.

BRUSKE: Where was it located?

ATKINSON: In the Jefferson Street building, Jefferson, Herkimer, and Eastern Avenue there.

BRUSKE: The high school building?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: What kind of atmosphere or feeling was there at the school at that time, being that is was the first Junior College really in the world? There weren't very many students there at that time, under a hundred. How did you, the other teachers, and the students feel? Did you feel it was kind of an experiment, this Junior College? What were you thinking about it at the time?

ATKINSON: We were thinking that we'd be going away to school somewhere and we might as well have the first year here. So we had a year here and transferred credits to whatever university we wanted to go to.

BRUSKE: Was it just one year that the students were studying there?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: The students now are spending freshman and sophomore years there.

ATKINSON: That began, I think, in 1922 when Doctor Smith came here to add the second year.

BRUSKE: But at that time it was just one year that you spent there and then you transferred to somewhere else.

ATKINSON: The University of Illinois.

BRUSKE: At that period of time, what type of students were coming to the Junior College?

ATKINSON: Well, they were chiefly people who had graduated the June before.

BRUSKE: Were these people at the top of their class when they graduated or can you say that there was a certain group of people that were coming out of high school that wanted to come to the Junior College?

ATKINSON: I think the idea was to take a few subjects and get credit down there, a year's credit, because some of the subjects we had were considered high school subjects; and since I had a course in U.S. History, I didn't get credit for it down there, but I got 23 credits altogether.

BRUSKE: Is it run like it is now--23 credit hours?

ATKINSON: Credit hours.

BRUSKE: I ask you because right at this point when someone is going out to the Junior College, 23 credit hours would seem like an awful lot. Is it the same now as it was then as far as credit hours?

ATKINSON: As far as I know. Of course, some of those credits I had earned in high school. For instance, chemistry; I had earned credits in chemistry in high school. I don't remember what else.

BRUSKE: What I was trying to get at before--the Junior College right now, the students that are coming out to the Junior College for the most part, I think it could be said, are not the people who graduated from the top of their class; and I was wondering if back then it was the same kind of situation where students from the middle of the class were going to Junior College and then transferring.

ATKINSON: I think the idea was that people who didn't have money enough to go four years in a row cut down on the investment by using the credits for the university.

BRUSKE: How much was the tuition then?

ATKINSON: There wasn't any tuition then.

BRUSKE: There was no tuition at the Junior College?

ATKINSON: There wasn't in the first year.

BRUSKE: In other words, anyone who had a high school degree and wanted to go further could take that one year for free? Did you have to pay for your books or any fees or anything?

ATKINSON: Yes, the same as you did if you were a senior in high school.

BRUSKE: As long as we're talking about money in college, were there opportunities for students to get money like scholarships or things like that? There is an awful lot of that now for students who can't afford it.

ATKINSON: There wasn't any that year that I went.

BRUSKE: So the students that didn't have that much money went to the Junior College which was free and had just another three years to go to the University. So you think most of the students going to the Junior College were transferring out to a different college? Was there something in the school for trades people? A great part of the Junior College now is for people to go in and learn to be machinists or something like that.

ATKINSON: It was very crude because, when I entered, it was just one year old and they hadn't really felt the pulse of what was going on at that time.

BRUSKE: The Junior College had just started. You were a senior in high school. What did you think about this Junior

College opening up when you were a high school senior looking to go to college?

ATKINSON: I took the chance that I would get credit for everything I took, which I didn't, because some of them I took were high school subjects I hadn't had before and then I used some of the high school credits I had earned as a senior and used them for college credit.

BRUSKE: I think something as new and as different, if it were opening today, people might be skeptical of going to a school like that. Was there a feeling like that?

ATKINSON: I don't know what the general feeling was, but my feeling was very good about it because it wouldn't take as much money to get through the University. When I went to the University, I went two years and then I stayed out a year to earn a little money and then went back and didn't work. I went back to the University of Illinois and finished then.

BRUSKE: When you came back in 1909, how was it set up? Can you give me some idea what the school was like when you came back to teach?

ATKINSON: It was as though there wasn't any college there at all. There was no particular section for college subjects and it was just like a fifth year student coming back to high school as far as the building conveniences and so on were concerned.

BRUSKE: In other words, it wasn't dramatically different from the high school. Was there a feeling of the students just continuing their high school education?

ATKINSON: Yes, they felt just as though they were in high school. They were taking subjects for which they were going to get college credit.

BRUSKE: Comparing it to the college today, there is some resentment on the part of some students that the Junior College is a lot like the high school and when they leave high school they really want to leave high school--they want to go to college. They want it to be different.

ATKINSON: That's all right if they have money. They don't have to go to Junior College.

BRUSKE: But was there a feeling like that back then that they wanted to break away?

ATKINSON: I don't think that they gave much thought to it. There was very little college spirit--practically none, you might say. The only thing was, they were taking more subjects and they were given a few more.

BRUSKE: Can you give me a description of your typical day while you were teaching mathematics there?

ATKINSON: It's just as though you were in high school. There was no college spirit about it because it was just getting started. It was just like a fifth year in high school.

BRUSKE: How many classes were you teaching a week?

ATKINSON: Oh, usually you had four, I believe.

BRUSKE: Were they going to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday? Set up like it is now? What would Monday be like if you were teaching down at the Junior College?

ATKINSON: Just like any other day.

BRUSKE: Did you drive to the Junior College in 1908, or was there a trolley? How did people get to the Junior College?

ATKINSON: They walked or came in a carriage. There weren't very many automobiles at that time.

BRUSKE: Did they have a parking lot for the faculty to come in with their horses or carriages?

ATKINSON: When they first started, there wasn't enough students in the Junior College to make provisions for that. It wasn't until later that they probably started.

BRUSKE: How many people were on the faculty at that time? Do you recall?

ATKINSON: I really don't remember. It could have been sixty. I don't know how many it was. You mean including the high school?

BRUSKE: No, just the Junior College.

ATKINSON: No, there wasn't anything like that. Most all the teachers had one class in Junior College and the rest they were teaching in high school.

BRUSKE: Then most of the Junior College teachers were people already teaching the high school?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: Let's take a typical Monday. You must have been teaching in the high school as well.

ATKINSON: I had only one class as I remember in high school. Of course, I had trig, and college algebra, and analytical geometry. Those were the subjects that I taught.

BRUSKE: Then you would arrive there in the morning, nine o'clock, eight o'clock, something like this?

ATKINSON: I think the day was the same all the way through. They didn't have special days to be there. The days were alike for high school teachers and college teachers.

BRUSKE: It must have been much like going to a high school today--being that type of atmosphere.

ATKINSON: There was no college atmosphere whatever.

BRUSKE: Just coming in certain times of the day and you would have a class and that would be your college class.

ATKINSON: They usually came all day long and took a full program the same as when they were seniors.

BRUSKE: How was the college growing--how did you see the college growing after you came back to teach in 1908?

ATKINSON: They were growing a little each year, but it wasn't until 1922 that they had two years at Junior College. Doctor Smith was here. He was the superintendent. He started the second year. I started teaching calculus at that time along with analytical geometry, trig, and college algebra. Not all those subjects in one semester, necessarily, but those were the subjects I was teaching.

BRUSKE: Then gradually after 1908 they were expanding the college. In other words, changing the number of courses someone could take or was it just more students taking courses? In what ways was it growing up?

ATKINSON: The same as high school is now; if anybody wanted to come, they came.

BRUSKE: The growth was more students coming in to make the college bigger.

ATKINSON: Then, of course, as new students came in, they may be introduced a new course here and there.

BRUSKE: All this while the tuition was still free?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: Is there anything that really stands out in your mind about the college, let's say between 1908 and the first world war, 1917?

ATKINSON: Of course, there were more students and they were offering more courses every year, but very slowly. They didn't do it fast.

BRUSKE: I'm trying to visualize the Junior College system which is rather large, it's all over the country now, just starting out at that period in time. Was it a big news type of thing? Were the people looking closely at what was happening on the first Junior College in the country? Was there a lot of attention on the first Junior College in the country?

ATKINSON: Do you mean in the first years? There wasn't a great deal of attention.

BRUSKE: In other words, it was kind of a slow, quiet, growing period. How then did the events in the United States, for instance, the first world war, affect the Junior College?

ATKINSON: The first world war began in 1914. . . I can't remember what effect it had on the Junior College. It cut down on the number of men students, of course; but I don't remember any particular effect that was had on the Junior College at that time.

BRUSKE: You said that it cut down on the number of men; were there quite a few females?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: Was it like 50-50, or were there a lot more males than females in the Junior College?

ATKINSON: I don't remember.

BRUSKE: But there were females at the Junior College. The Junior College was growing up and this Mr. Smith came in 1922 --what was the situation of the Junior College like in 1922 when Mr. Smith came? How much had it changed, grown up?

ATKINSON: Yes, it has grown up quite a bit; and there were more courses offered, of course, and they started second year courses, too. That's when calculus began. Different college courses had come in the second year. There weren't always enough to form a course; but they were offered.

BRUSKE: How big were your classes then?

ATKINSON: The first calculus class I had, had five people in it.

BRUSKE: What was it like for you to teach a class with only five or a dozen people?

ATKINSON: Delightful.

BRUSKE: Was that something that you were used to?

ATKINSON: No, I wasn't used to it, but it was fun to have that few people in class. You can give each one of them so much more attention.

BRUSKE: What would you say about the education you got or that your students got beginning in 1922? Could you say something to characterize your education?

ATKINSON: It became better each year, of course, because many of the teachers hadn't had any college experience; most of them hadn't been teaching college, I mean. And it just grew like anything else grew. The Junior College now is a much more elaborate institution than it was when they were in high school. See, they were cramped by being crowded in the same building with high school students and they didn't have the room. They didn't have the number of classrooms. Of course, in 1922 they started a regular Junior College system. You only had to be there when you had classes, if that's what you wanted. You could go out of the building and go anywhere you wanted.

BRUSKE: You were delighted to teach only five people in a class. I imagine that the students probably liked that type of a class more, too.

ATKINSON: They did.

BRUSKE: Do you think, then, that they were getting a good education?

ATKINSON: Yes, but as we taught longer. . . That was the first calculus class that I ever taught. As we taught longer, we go better because we knew more of what we were doing than we did when we first started. But they got credit right off. When they went to their third year, most of them went to the University of Illinois. I think they all have very fine records. We were very sure about our teaching that they were getting the stuff. Although, when the first class got done

there, they got in some kind of a mess with the University; I don't know what it was. I suppose the teachers were slow to accept them. Three of them came back.

BRUSKE: Were there students like yourself that were going to the Junior College, transferring, and then coming back to teach? Was that something that a lot of people were doing?

ATKINSON: No, not a lot of people because there weren't many openings. In college they used the high school teachers mostly. They weren't hiring special teachers for the Junior College, because they had to teach Junior College and high school. So they just used the high school teachers.

BRUSKE: I caught something that you said before, about 1922, when they changed some of the rules about having to stay on the campus all day long, and things like that. Were the people in the Junior College before that under the rules of the high school? Did they have to be there all day?

ATKINSON: When I first started there, people stayed there just as though they were in high school; but they took these other courses.

BRUSKE: In 1922, then, when Mr. Smith came, was it his idea to change it to a two-year college or how did that happen?

ATKINSON: Well, as they got numbers to form classes. . . You see, if they had done that the first year, there probably wouldn't have been enough to form a class in anything. When they did start the classes, they were small; and you had to

build up. As time went on, more students went to the Junior College.

BRUSKE: Can you recall about how many students were there at that time, even in 1922?

ATKINSON: No, I have no idea.

BRUSKE: What did that do to the college then when they started offering second-year courses? Was there a big increase in the number of students?

ATKINSON: Well, the Junior College always grew slowly. There wasn't any particular growth as I remember. Of course, that's getting a long way in my memory, too. I have to stop and think.

BRUSKE: Who decided to start offering second-year courses?

ATKINSON: You mean to start athletics?

BRUSKE: To start offering second-year courses, how did that happen?

ATKINSON: You mean on the faculty?

BRUSKE: Yes. How did they work it? Was that a new president that you had Mr. Smith?

ATKINSON: Doctor Smith. I don't remember whether it was his first year or not; but he was the first man who started the second year.

BRUSKE: Then it was just kind of a, "Well, we have got more students here and we can start offering second-year courses now," something like that. Could it have happened that way? I'm just trying to find out how it happened that they started offering second-year courses.

ATKINSON: When the students were numerous enough so that they knew that when it did start, it would start in a small way. I don't remember the limit on the smallest, but I know I had a calculus class that had five members in it. Then when the war came along, the numbers dropped.

ATKINSON: At that time there weren't any students paying tuition to go to the college and you say that during World War I the numbers dropped; I know that right now when the numbers drop, the college is in a little bit of trouble because they need that money from the students. Where was the college getting its money from at that time?

ATKINSON: Well, from the school board.

BRUSKE: Was there a college school board?

ATKINSON: No, just the same high school board.

BRUSKE: The money that the high school board collected, they gave a certain amount to the Junior College?

ATKINSON: Yes.

BRUSKE: I see.

ATKINSON: It was really a part of the high school. There was no college atmosphere around anywhere when it started.

BRUSKE: Even when they offered second-year courses, the money was coming from the high school and the tuition was free and everything.

ATKINSON: I don't remember what year they started charging tuition, if it was in 1922 or what it was, I don't remember.

BRUSKE: What kind of effect would something like the depression have on the school?

ATKINSON: I don't remember. I have no clear memory of that.

BRUSKE: Were there still the same number and type of students coming to school during the depression or did it really slack off?

ATKINSON: I don't remember.

BRUSKE: After they started offering second-year courses and there were more students coming in and they were sharing space with the high school, do you remember if there were conflicts starting to grow between the high school and the Junior College as far as Junior College crowding and possibly being in the way?

ATKINSON: Well, the Junior College only had to be there when the classes were going, that is when they had a class that they had to come to. Other times, they would be around the

hallways, and there was quite a problem keeping order so that they didn't disturb the high school students, and some of the faculty were at fault, too. It wasn't a very satisfactory arrangement, ever, to have the high school and the Junior College in the high school building, because as the numbers increased, they ran on a college basis.

BRUSKE: Well, you said that maybe it wasn't a very satisfactory arrangement. I'm just wondering what kind of thoughts the students were having. Nowadays the students would get up and make a big ruckus about the conditions and things like that. Were the students back then concerned? Did they show concern for how the Junior College was being run and what was happening there?

ATKINSON: The Junior College students? Yes, they were concerned about it. Some of them were real students and others just didn't know what else to do so they signed up for Junior College. Not all of the graduates of Junior College went to college; they dropped out then. They left to work.

BRUSKE: But were the students organized to be of help to make decisions in the Junior College, or what was the relationship between the administration and the students? Were the students active in saying that they should possibly move from the high school, or how did they show their concern?

ATKINSON: Oh, there was a lot of talk later in the years of Junior College getting separate buildings; but, of course,

they eventually got a separate building and that was that.

BRUSKE: Did students then have a newspaper?

ATKINSON: I think so.

BRUSKE: Well, then, they had some type of student government?

ATKINSON: A student government, council?

BRUSKE: Yes, a student council, something like that.

ATKINSON: I suppose they did. I don't remember anything like that.

BRUSKE: But you say there wasn't much college atmosphere. How active were they in extra-curricular type of things at the Junior College?

ATKINSON: Well, of course, a lot of the students who went into the Junior College weren't serious students. Then there was another section that were students; they wanted to get all they could out of the courses. And they had, on account of the classes being so small, an excellent opportunity to learn if they wanted to. But there was sort of a mixture of students who just didn't know what else to do and other people who went because they didn't have the money to go to college for four years, and they wanted to get what they could out of it.

BRUSKE: I think you could probably look at how things are

being taught now and how mathematics is being taught now.

What kind of differences can you see in the methods of teaching and what was being taught?

ATKINSON: Of course, I haven't been teaching since 1939 in college. I don't know how it's being handled now the last thirty-some years. At the time I was teaching in college, I thought things improved every year. The teachers that were teaching in college were getting more experience and they had, as far as the size of the classes were concerned, the advantage of small classes.

BRUSKE: I'm just trying to relate some of the things that happened recently in the ways of teaching and what's being taught, as it tried to keep up with events and things like that. For instance, when the Russians sent a satellite, Sputnik, in 1959, then there was a big boom in science and mathematics to catch up and start sending our own spaceships up. Were there things like that happening back then that were changing the ways and the things that you were teaching in mathematics or in other subjects?

ATKINSON: Well, I don't know about science because I never taught science except first-year science as a fill-in subject when I first came here. In mathematics I don't think what they're teaching now is much improvement over what they were teaching when I taught. Of course, it differs in this way. The main difference, I think, is to cover things that are happening . You have certain things in mathematics

and you deal with problems of science that are more closely related to events of the day--changes in science and stuff like that. On the whole, I think, the subject matter has to be the same because math doesn't change in its truth. What's true one year is true the next in mathematics.

BRUSKE: Can you recall, though, as a teacher, being asked to catch up or you yourself being asked to learn any new development in mathematics, new ideas that were coming out in mathematics? Were there ways that it was changing at all that you had to relate to as a teacher in Junior College?

ATKINSON: I'm only speaking for mathematics because that's all I ever taught in college. Your math doesn't change that much. It was all the old system of mathematics and everything taught was more or less true.

BRUSKE: Can you give me some idea of what materials were like that you were teaching with, the students were learning with --books, teaching aids, things like that. What were the math books like?

ATKINSON: Well, we had textbooks and we followed the textbooks. Straight math was taught in those days. I don't imagine it's too different from the way it's taught now. Except the illustrations they would use in teaching would be more modern on account of the change in science.

BRUSKE: You taught at the Junior College in what would have been about thirty years since you first started teaching

there. What was it like thirty years later?

ATKINSON: I don't know what it's like now because I hadn't taught for twenty-some years.

BRUSKE: Okay. I'm just trying to get at what it was like thirty years after you started. How had it changed in those thirty years?

ATKINSON: Well, there wasn't the change in math that there was in science except that you took your illustrations to fit the changes in science. But you usually followed your textbook, whatever that happened to be; and they usually would account for the changes.

BRUSKE: Was there a different type of student going there than in the late thirties just before you left, or were the students more or less like you had been when you first started?

ATKINSON: Not like I had been when I was a student there, because it was just a year old when I entered. They were doing, I would say, as good work as they were getting at the University of Illinois in math.

BRUSKE: By that time had the school started to go into the area of a trade school-type of thing? I'm trying to find out if the students were changing. When you were there, most of the students were getting a free year of college education and then transferring on. Had the students changed somehow so.

that there were some students like you plus a mixture of other students who were getting an education in some kind of a trade?

ATKINSON: You see, any students that I had were going on to college and weren't just there to fill in time--most of them-- So as far as student attitude is concerned, it was improving because more people were coming to Junior College and a lot of them wanted to get their math out of the way before they go to college. Most of the students in math were good; and they had excellent records when they went to the University of Illinois. All I know about their records at the University was when they'd come back and tell you what they made. They usually made grades higher than the University students, it seemed to me.

BRUSKE: Are there any students that stand out in your mind that you had then that maybe are very successful right now?

ATKINSON: Oh, yes. One man, for instance, was a teacher at the University of. . . Wooster, that's where it was located. I can't think of the name of the university. It was a prominent eastern university. He had an excellent record there. There were several of our students that really got into math in a big way.

BRUSKE: Would you have had John Houbolt in any of your classes?

ATKINSON: Yes. He was an excellent student. He's probably

the most outstanding student I ever had. He was an engineer, of course, and he took up through calculus in Junior College. I don't remember what math he had at the university, but I know he had the next math after calculus. I don't know how many courses he had afterward, but he was an excellent student.

BRUSKE: I had the pleasure of introducing Dr. Houbolt when they dedicated the new college out there and the introduction goes on to say that he was a student at the Junior College and now he's a very prominent scientist and all this. I'm just trying to imagine what it would have been like to have taught him in school then.

ATKINSON: He was a very outstanding student and he always got top grades, and we expected great things out of him when he left here.

BRUSKE: Do you happen to remember what years it was that he was in Junior College in your classes? Was that early thirties or late thirties?

ATKINSON: I imagine it was in the twenties somewhere, but I don't remember just when.

BRUSKE: What would classes have been like for him then? What would it have been like for him to go to school back then?

ATKINSON: He wasn't that early. I would say he was in the late twenties; I'm not sure just what the date of his attendance there was. He did all of his work and he did problems

that no one else could do and all that sort of thing. He was a very brilliant kid. He wasn't the only one; there were other kids we had. We had good students because most of the engineers that went to different universities took their math at Junior College. That is, they took their algebra and trigonometry and analytical geometry and calculus. That's all we had and they took them all.

BRUSKE: What would your relationship have been to any student, maybe even to John Houbolt? Were the students and the teachers close back then in the early days of the Junior College? Did you talk about other things, maybe about politics or anything?

ATKINSON: Yes, we knew the students much better than the students at the University of Illinois knew their instructors because we all felt as though the Junior College kids had to make good grades to get by when they went away to the university. John Houbolt could talk about most subjects. While he was a very quiet kid in high school, he knew what he was supposed to know.

BRUSKE: You say that you wanted to make sure that the students had good grades when they went on to a different school. I was going to ask you if you could get into the matter of philosophy exactly what your aims and purposes were as the faculty trying to teach these students in a new junior college. Were there things that you were trying to do for these students?

ATKINSON: We were trying to bring them as near perfect as we could in the Junior College subjects, but I don't understand what you mean beyond that.

BRUSKE: Well, I'm trying to get at the philosophy of the school as far as being at that time almost one of a kind, and if there was an effort on the part of the teachers and the administration to do something different for the school--be more intimate with them, possibly do something special with the students to make sure that they weren't just any student--that they went on to bigger and better things. Was this something that was in your mind?

ATKINSON: When we had smaller classes, we were more in touch with what your students were doing, how much time they were putting on their work, what their attitude was toward it, and so on. In the Junior College mathematics, most of the students in the second year were engineers. In fact, I don't remember any of them that weren't engineers or either people that were majoring in mathematics. Maybe they wanted to teach math or something like that.

BRUSKE: As far as the faculty and administration all getting together and saying, "Our purpose is to make sure that we really get down and get close to these students and make sure that they aren't just any student, but that they're special, and when they leave Joliet Junior College, they've got something better than they would have gotten anywhere else," is that something that was a philosophy of the whole school or

was it just an individual idea?

ATKINSON: I don't think the program was to make students better than they could get it anywhere else, but those who were anxious to make good grades had a chance to do it in Junior College on account of the small classes. See, five students in a class aren't very many and in one class I remember I had only three students. That was when the war started; classes went down to three, and they were mostly boys because they were engineers. Most of the classes I had in math in Junior College were boys.

BRUSKE: If there were some teachers only teaching Junior College and some teachers teaching both Junior College and high school, was there a difference in what some students were being taught? Do you have an opinion about how some teachers might have been better for the students than others because they were just teaching Junior College?

ATKINSON: No, they had to give them all they could because they were going to get credit for it, and that would establish the future of the university. When we first started, the Junior College teachers weren't as good as they were later on because they didn't have the experience of teaching. But along in the 1920's somewhere, when they organized the second year, the first year was pretty well organized. Then the second-year teachers would teach one college class maybe. That's all I ever had in Junior College in math was calculus.

BRUSKE: All your other courses were in high school?

ATKINSON: They were all first-year classes.

BRUSKE: Oh, your only second-year course was calculus?

ATKINSON: But that's all we ever taught. All I taught there in the second year was calculus.

BRUSKE: As far as you can remember, there wasn't really a program for occupational training, going in and learning how to be a machinist or a nurse or something like that?

ATKINSON: Not that I can recall.

BRUSKE: What were the major areas of study back then in the first twenty years?

ATKINSON: English, Rhetoric, College Algebra, Trigonometry, Chemistry, Physics--just standard subjects. There were no particular classes that had in mind dropping out at the end of Junior College.

BRUSKE: Being that there was no tuition, that would mean that the Junior College would be open to just about anyone who had a high school education. Did you have in your classes, or did you go to school with them when you were a student at the Junior College, minority students--maybe black students, or Irish students, or people like this who were a minority?

ATKINSON: Yes, there were some; but there weren't very many. When I first went in, there weren't any.

BRUSKE: Would there have been any conflict with blacks or any kind of minority students being in there?

ATKINSON: I don't remember any, no.

BRUSKE: The reason I ask that is because I was talking with another woman who had been living here in the early part of the century and she recalled that her father sent her into Joliet to be educated specifically because they lived in an Irish community and the Irish were very uneducated and he didn't care to have her going to school with them. I was trying to find out if something like that was happening at the Junior College, or even in high school, if you were teaching classes in high school. Were there ever any problems with Irish or minority people?

ATKINSON: Not that I can recall.

BRUSKE: When you were just leaving, of course, Hitler was starting to take over in Germany. Were students talking about these types of things? Did you have conversations with students?

ATKINSON: I don't remember they felt concerned much about it.

BRUSKE: What did you do after you left the Junior College?

ATKINSON: Bought this house, stayed here, and that was it.

BRUSKE: What were people's reactions--you started at the Junior College in 1909--when somebody said, "Mr. Atkinson,

what do you do for a living?" Would you say, "I'm a junior college teacher," or something like that?

ATKINSON: Well, after I came here to teach in high school, I switched to German. I taught German until 1919. It gradually disappeared with the war. There was no German at all for quite a while and then I went back to teaching math again. I enjoyed teaching in Junior College more than in high school because the kids were more serious. In high school, they took it because they had to. In college, they chose a course they wanted and usually they meant business.

BRUSKE: You say that during the war, that would have been the First World War, they didn't teach German for that period of time?

ATKINSON: I've forgotten the date when they stopped. I think it was 1919 the last class that I taught.

BRUSKE: Was it just a period of time that they didn't teach German or did they stop completely teaching German?

ATKINSON: There was no demand for it. There was no German taught at all there for quite a while and then they started up later.

BRUSKE: But if somebody asked you then what you did for a living and you told them that you were a mathematics teacher at Joliet Junior College, what would their reaction have been? Junior College wasn't really a big thing then, even

ten years after it was started, was it? How would people have reacted when you told them that you taught at the Junior College?

ATKINSON: I don't remember any particular reaction.

BRUSKE: I was just trying to find out if it was still unusual back then or if it was accepted in the public or if it would have gotten a lot of surprise from people.

ATKINSON: I don't know why it would surprise them. I came here to teach Junior College in the first place and I had one high school class along with the college program because there wasn't enough for a full program in mathematics.

BRUSKE: Would you have the feeling while you were there that it was anything unusual like maybe an experiment in education?

ATKINSON: No, I just had a feeling that it was a part of education like going to college. When the Junior College started people weren't very conscious of it. The seniors were talked to about college and some of them enrolled and some of them didn't. Miss Barns, who was part of the History Department there, she went, even though there was this Junior College here started, to Northwestern University right off because her aunt paid her way, helped her financially.

BRUSKE: Looking back on it, you were at the Junior College for about thirty years. What would stick out in your mind most about the Junior College and your whole way of life being

a teacher at the Junior College.

ATKINSON: Of course, on the part of some students they didn't feel that they were getting university work because it was being taught in high school. They didn't think it was as valuable. I never had that attitude toward it. I always thought that they were having an unusual opportunity to get college subjects, in particular calculus, because that didn't come along until about 1921 or 1922, I guess.

BRUSKE: Is there anything that you can say about Joliet during the period that would be particularly outstanding in your memories?

ATKINSON: The people were always proud of the high school, you know, because when that high school was first built, there wasn't anything like it in the state. That was considered a very fine building. I don't remember much about what you're driving at.

BRUSKE: Another question comes to my mind when you say they were very proud of the high school and it was something unique in the state. The Junior College came along and certainly that was something very unique. What would you say about the people in Joliet? Were they a progressive type of people?

ATKINSON: Well, just like any town the size of Joliet, there were some people that were interested and some who weren't. Those people who were interested were usually the fair type student who had file records, and people who learned. About

the only people who went to Junior College were people who wanted to go to college.

BRUSKE: The people of Joliet, I get the impression from what you say, were innovative; and people, when they talked about the Junior College, would talk about something that was innovative, that was new. The people who started things like this, the high school and the Junior College, did they kind of reflect a progressive spirit of Joliet or an intellectual spirit?

ATKINSON: Yes, it did with the upper-class people in Joliet who wanted to go to college. But there were some who came because they didn't know what else to do, so they came here to the Junior College; but the people who took math were usually serious. Even though the first class I ever had was calculus, I think only one of them stayed on and the others dropped out. Some of them went on to college later on. They felt inferior, you know, even though they weren't. They felt inferior because they always had an idea of college as being tops in scholarship, you know. That isn't true of colleges at all. In colleges you have strays just as you have in high school. A lot of people go to high school that don't want to go to high school; but they have to go until they're sixteen. There are people like that that didn't intend to go on to college ever, but the majority of people that went to the first classes in Junior College did want to go to college. The first years of Junior College the teachers weren't as good as they were later because they'd had more experience with college

teaching, most of them.

BRUSKE: I think even now there are probably a lot of students that do feel a little inferior when somebody says, "Where do you go to school?" You say, "I go to Joliet Junior College." And if the person is somebody from the University of Illinois or University of Wisconsin, maybe you feel a little bit inferior; and I get that impression that they felt that way back then.

ATKINSON: They did. They felt that way, but they soon found out that they could do as well here in some courses than they could do at the University of Illinois or any other school.

BRUSKE: Did you have any of those kinds of feelings while you were teaching? I mean as a teacher when somebody said to you, "What do you do for a living?", you say, "I teach at Joliet Junior College.", what kind of feelings did you have?

ATKINSON: I was proud of it.

BRUSKE: You had already found out that you'd get just as good an education at Joliet Junior College as you could anywhere else.

ATKINSON: When I started to teach here, there was quite a bit of an improvement in the student body that were entering Junior College; but the numbers were very small. When I first came here to teach in Junior College, it was 1909 and the Junior College had been going six or seven years by that time. In that length of time there had been quite an improvement in

the Junior College.

BRUSKE: The Junior College was supported by the high school board, like a part of the high school. There weren't really any problems with the Junior College trying to make it financially. They weren't struggling like that, but do you remember any periods of time when the Junior College, maybe the teachers in the Junior College, were dissatisfied or maybe when the students were dissatisfied and the school was kind of struggling or had problems or something like this?

ATKINSON: In my own classes I don't remember any problems like that.

BRUSKE: But, in other words, there weren't things happening like there were today. Today it's not that unusual to find teachers out on strike or even students out on strike, but there wasn't anything that might have happened back then?

ATKINSON: There were never any strikes in high school when I was there.

BRUSKE: And nothing like that at the Junior College either?

ATKINSON: No.

BRUSKE: They didn't have very many problems at all, in other words?

ATKINSON: The only problem they had when I was teaching there was the college grew and the kids were restless about having no particular building for the college.

BRUSKE: Having to go to school with high school students was not their idea of college?

ATKINSON: No, it made them feel inferior to college people, you see, because they were tied in with a group of high school students.

BRUSKE: Well, I can't think of anything that would be significant as far as a question is concerned. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

ATKINSON: Well, I think the Junior College is here to stay. Students are still arriving on a full-time basis. Joliet was the first one in Illinois, the first one anywhere as far as I know. It took a little while for them to gather a feeling of strength which I think they have now. The Junior College now isn't a place to really start you education; I mean it isn't only that because they now have courses in Junior College that end in Junior College. You don't go beyond that at all; but in the old days, the college was based on students who were expected to graduate at a university somewhere.

BRUSKE: It was a Junior College that was a stepping stone and really a very convenient kind of stepping stone for students to go on to college.

ATKINSON: Yes.

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